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**HOW'S YOUR**

# **PUBLIC RELATIONS?**

**A GUIDE FOR  
EXTENSION WORKERS**



PA-438

**FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE**



# HOW'S YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS?

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Ever feel a little irritated about the meeting that ran too long? A curt reply on the phone? The treatment you got at someone's office? Or the reply to your letter that was long overdue?

Sure you have! And it probably didn't leave you with a good impression of the person or organization you were dealing with.

But let's remember that poor public relations—like accidents—don't always happen to other people. If we're careless, we can have poor public relations, too.

Many people think of public relations as a "souped-up" or high-powered program—a sort of magic broom to whisk away all our public relations ailments. Actually public relations, good or bad, are the result of our everyday activities. No press agent gimmicks can substitute for good day-by-day relations with your publics—farmers, homeowners, housewives, bankers, businessmen, mass media representatives, public officials, and others.

Of course, we won't have truly effective public relations unless we provide constructive service to peo-



A satisfied customer—the basis of good public relations!



ple. But just doing a good job will not guarantee that we enjoy good public relations. As a public relations expert once advised agricultural leaders:

"It is not enough to do the daily job, with the hope that the public will evaluate it favorably. It is not enough to depend on the public relations done by the Federal or State agencies.

"The folks you work with are concerned about you, about what you do, and about what (for good or ill) it may mean directly to them

in their own home community.

"Unless they feel good about what you are doing—understand why—and feel it is good for them, your work will be far harder to accomplish than it need be. . . ."

This leaflet does not attempt to cover every aspect of a good public-relations program. Its purpose is to try to provide a few practical guidelines to help you evaluate and improve your everyday relations with your publics. To help you accomplish your work easier and more effectively.

## AT THE OFFICE

### Correspondence

Acknowledge letters promptly. Nothing is quite so frustrating as to write a letter and not receive an answer within a reasonable time. A long unanswered letter may make the letterwriter wonder if you've received his letter, or if he should make some further effort to contact you. Or worse still, he may assume that you received the letter but that you gave him low priority.

The writer may reach entirely mistaken conclusions. Perhaps you're out of the office when the letter arrives. Or you may have to get some additional information before you can answer.

But your correspondent may have no way of knowing this. A way to avoid this situation is to acknowledge the letter and explain that you're getting together some additional facts pertaining to his problem.

Or if you're away from your office for any length of time, arrange for your secretary or a fellow worker to acknowledge letters and fill requests, if possible. Many routine matters can be handled promptly and efficiently by your secretary—if she has been properly briefed before you leave.

### Office Calls

Make sure that the visitor receives a prompt, friendly greeting . . . as soon as he arrives.



Someone left to "cool his heels" outside your office won't be receptive to your ideas.

Remember how awkward and embarrassing it can be to walk into an office and be ignored.

A courteous "May I help you?" when the caller appears adds to his ease and usually obtains information concerning the purpose of his call.

If you are busy with another appointment at the moment, the secretary should be instructed to refer the caller to another agent who is available. Or she should tell the caller approximately when you will be free.

Keep appointments. If one caller dips into another's appointment time or is obviously wasting your time, explain courteously that you must end the discussion at this time but will continue it later.

Another alternative is to arrange with your secretary to enter quietly and inform you that "Mr. So-and-So" is waiting to see you. Either of these is more polite than keeping the next person waiting.

If something comes up that makes it impossible for you to keep an appointment, be honest with the person waiting. He'll be more understanding if you give him a frank explanation.

Maintain office hours and let people know what they are. Everyone in the office should know the others' schedules. Allotting a definite time for field travel will make it easier for visitors to find you "in."

Be sure to keep in close contact with your secretary so she won't have to tell visitors and telephone callers she doesn't know where you are. This will save embarrassment for you and the secretary—and will spare your callers irritation.

## Office Identification

Nothing is more irritating than trying to find a place that isn't clearly marked. Provide signs iden-



A visitor can find your office easily if it is identified with a good sign.

tifying your office—both outside the building and on the door of your office—so that they are clearly visible to the public.

## Office Appearance

Remember, your office represents the land-grant college in your State and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A clean, neat, and well-equipped office is an important factor in giving the public a good impression of you and the Extension Service and will help you do a better job.

And what about the comfort and convenience of your visitors?

Do visitors have a comfortable place to wait? Do they have a good selection of bulletins and magazines to thumb through while waiting? Is your work and storage space screened off so that visitors can have a certain amount of privacy if necessary? Are lighting, heat, and ventilation satisfactory?

Keep in mind that your office will be compared with the well-ordered offices of doctors, lawyers, and other professional people in your town.

## Telephone Calls

When the telephone rings, you have no way of knowing for sure



who is on the other end of the line. Thus, the telephone injects an air of mystery into our daily chores. Friends can be made or lost quickly by how their call is handled.

Since your secretary will usually answer the telephone, it's important that she understand and practice good telephone manners.

The four basic considerations in handling telephone calls are: promptness in answering, identification of speakers, direct and full information, and courtesy.

If you're unavailable when a call comes in, the secretary should

either: (1) offer to refer the caller to someone else, (2) ask if she can be of service, or (3) offer to take a message.

The secretary should also get the name and telephone number of the caller so that you can return his call—promptly!

Courtesy should be the byword of the person answering the telephone. Although it may be helpful for you to know who is on the other end of the line, instruct the secretary to ask, "May I tell Mr. So-and-So who is calling?," not "Who's calling?," or "Who is this?"

## AWAY FROM THE OFFICE

### Farm and Home Visits

Keep appointments. Remember, when you get behind schedule on one visit, you may inconvenience others as you try to get back on

schedule. Let your secretary know your itinerary and when you'll return to the office.

Remember promises made during farm and home visits. Make a note of that publication you



Keep things "rolling"—get to appointments on time.

promised Mr. Smith and mail it to him promptly.

## Meetings

Start and stop meetings promptly. Nothing can spoil an otherwise successful meeting quite as much as delaying its start or letting the discussion drag on after the meeting should have adjourned. If

people know they can depend on getting out of a meeting on time, they'll be more apt to attend.

Be prepared. It's too risky trying to do things off the cuff. Adequate preparation will help make sure you get across the points you want to make. Also, you'll find it easier to avoid "rambling," and will be able to end meetings on time.

# WORKING WITH SPECIAL GROUPS

## Extension Council

One of the most important groups you work with is your Extension Council. Its counsel, encouragement, and support is essential for an effective extension program.

Win the full confidence and support of the council by observing these simple rules of human and public relations:

1. Solicit the council's advice on programs, policies, and other extension matters. Do this in a sincere spirit—not just because you feel you must.

2. Don't play favorites with council members. Treat each as an essential member of the extension team.

3. Keep council members fully informed of developments and decisions. Don't keep some members in the "dark" on matters you've discussed privately with others.

4. Don't take all the credit for

extension accomplishments. Make council members feel that the credit is as much theirs as yours. Pay public, as well as private, tribute to the council's work.

## Other Organizations

Get acquainted with the leaders of various organizations, churches, and schools; elected and appointed representatives of town, county, and State governing bodies; and local businessmen. Don't sit back and wait for them to come to you. These people can play a big role in program planning if they understand what you are trying to accomplish.

## Mass Media

If you haven't already done so, get to know your mass media people—personally.

If you want to improve your rela-



Keep fellow members of the staff informed about meetings or other events you're holding. It creates an impression of coordination when an agent knows about an event a caller inquires about—even if the agent is not directly concerned with the event.

Tell your fellow workers when you invite visitors (specialists, supervisors, etc.) to the county. This helps avoid the surprised expression or the "What are you doing here?" remark—dead giveaway that the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing.

Interoffice bickering, competition, jealousy, and conflicting attitudes

can weaken relations with the public—as well as impair morale and efficiency within the office.

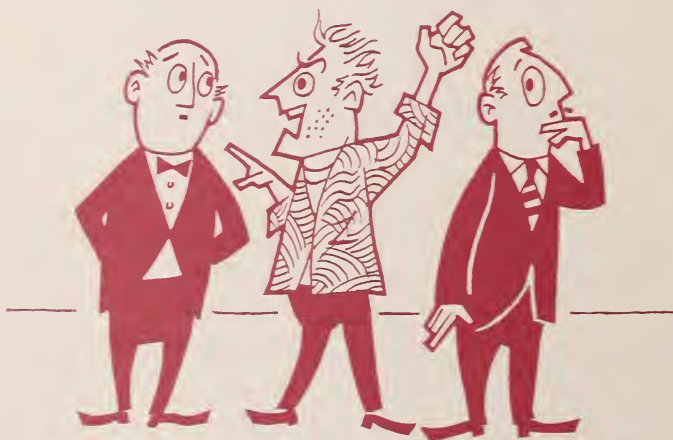
Much of this can be headed off if we make a conscious effort to understand our fellow workers; if we know their problems, personalities, responsibilities, and what they're trying to accomplish. Loyalty is a requisite in a close-knit extension "family."

One of the quickest ways for staff morale to plummet is for one member to publicly air his grievances against other staff members. Disagreements—and some of these are bound to occur—should be ironed out in privacy or at staff meetings.

## STRICTLY PERSONAL

This comes under the category of "your best friend won't tell you." Let's face it—our appear-

ance and habits often determine the impression we make on other people.



A rugged individual? This type most people can do without.



W. M. Fifield, provost for Agriculture, University of Florida, in commenting on this delicate subject said that he believes that the lack of ability or desire to conform with appropriateness to the occasion holds more people back than any other, "save sheer incompetence." He called this "crudeness."

Fifield said, "crudeness can be displayed verbally through poor grammar and expression, or what is worse, through vulgarity. . . . There are other ways people can be offensive.

"Once in a while we find the rugged individualist, who, just because others think it's appropriate on an occasion to wear a coat and tie, is no sign he has to. This type of character feels that neatness and conformity to conventional rules is associated with a lack of virility. Unfortunately for him, others associate it with ignorance.

"If you have to meet with people, travel with them, and eat with them, it seems sensible not to offend their sense of appropriateness, dignity, sight, taste, or smell."

## EVALUATE YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

Maintaining good public relations must be a continuous thing. A week-long, month-long, or year-long campaign won't do the job.

One way to keep on top of the situation is to evaluate your public relations program at regular intervals—say the weekly staff meeting.

All members of the staff should be encouraged to discuss strong and weak points—and to feel free to offer suggestions for improvement.

The scene should be set so that no one becomes embarrassed about having his public relations shortcomings pointed out to him. If done in an analytical manner—not critically—the person will probably appreciate it. This calls for

great tact on everyone's part.

In evaluating your personal and office public relations put yourself in the other person's shoes. Make a note of things that irritate you about other people and try to determine if you or others on the staff have these or other irritating habits. If so, try to eliminate these practices.

On the other hand, try to remember the things that other people do that make you feel good toward them and their organization. Then incorporate these into your public relations.

Almost everyone appreciates consideration and courtesy—and these are the bedrock of any public relations program.



# WHAT'S YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS SCORE?

DO I . . .

PLEASE CHECK

- |  |          |         |
|--|----------|---------|
| 1. Answer letters promptly?                                      | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 2. Make sure that visitors are greeted promptly and courteously? | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 3. Always keep appointments?                                     | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 4. Practice good telephone manners?                              | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 5. Remember promises?  | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 6. Start and stop meetings promptly?                             | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 7. Keep co-workers informed about what I'm doing?                | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 8. Give credit where credit is due?                              | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 9. Avoid airing "family" disagreements in public?                | yes_____ | no_____ |
| 10. Conform to conventional rules of dress and actions?          | yes_____ | no_____ |

Cooperative Extension Work: United States Department of Agriculture and  
State Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Cooperating.

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